

THANKSGIVING SUNDAY SERMON

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I've noticed a trend the past few years in the entertainment business against the holiday we know as Christmas. For example, this year there's going to be a movie called "Four Christmases" starring Vince Vaughn and Reese Witherspoon. It's about a couple who usually flee the country for the holidays but are snowbound and forced to visit four different sets of relatives on Christmas. Some of you may think that's a comedy, but those of us who have lived it know that it's a cross between a drama and a horror movie.

A few years ago, John Grisham wrote a book with a similar theme, in which the main family, who was always known for their lavish holiday displays, decided they were going to forgo the festivities one year and vacation someplace sunny. The name of the book was "Skipping Christmas."

I'm wondering this year if we shouldn't consider skipping Thanksgiving. When you get right down to it, it doesn't seem like there's much to be thankful for. You know it's a sad commentary when we get excited that gas is only two dollars a gallon. The economy, the war, the environment – really, what is there to celebrate this Thanksgiving? Just give me a shot of tryptophan and let me sleep through Nov. 23. I'm sure there will be plenty of leftovers the next day.

That's a ludicrous idea, right? Who would dare skip Thanksgiving? I want you to think about what you would miss if we decided to cancel Thanksgiving. What would you miss? Maybe the home-cooked meal with all your favorite dishes. Or getting together with your relatives, which my family is looking forward to doing. Maybe you'd miss relaxing after the meal to watch football or a movie. Maybe you'd miss a few days rest from your lives. If we skipped Thanksgiving this year, what would you miss?

Whatever you'd miss is what I want you to be thankful for today. Often times, true gratitude only kicks in when something is threatened. Like the old line says, "You don't know what you got til it's gone." Thanksgiving is a time to stop and take stock of what we have, and doing so will hopefully produce in us overwhelming feelings of gratitude.

Of course, it doesn't do that for everyone. Some people only see what they wish they had. Resentment makes us say, "I didn't get what I deserved." But true gratitude says, "I didn't deserve what I got." As Henri Nouwen says, "Gratitude goes beyond 'mine' and 'thine' and claims the truth that all of life is a pure gift. The discipline of gratitude is the explicit effort to acknowledge that all that I am and have is given to me as a gift of love, a gift to be celebrated with joy."

The discipline of gratitude. Those two words don't seem to go together, do they? We think of discipline as something stern, rigid, requiring practice and dedication, while gratitude is spontaneous, free-flowing, and effervescent. But Nouwen makes a good point. Gratitude is a choice on our part. We choose to respond to our situation with resentment, with despair, or with gratitude. That takes practice, it takes discipline. And yet, if we really want to live a life that says "Thank you", we will take our faith seriously, because that is the great thanksgiving to God for what God has done.

This morning is a chance to say "Thank you" to God. I ask you, if you would like, to share at least something for which you want to give God thanks this year. When

everyone has shared who wishes to do so, I will lead us in a prayer and then we will sing the hymn listed in the bulletin.

I will start by saying I am thankful for you. I couldn't imagine a more loving, supportive church. This congregation has been wonderful to my family and me during our time here. I thank you for being such a faithful church family and I thank God for sending me here. You are truly a blessing to me.